





Denpa-teki na Kanojo - Volume 01 Chapter 01-02 (Incomplete)

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Chapter 1 - The Words of Allegiance are Bonds from the Previous Life

Chapter 1 The Words of Allegiance are Bonds from the Previous Life

Normally, what would you think when someone asks you to go to the back of the gym after class?

If it were a friend who's calling you out, it's probably because they want to you tell some kind of secret. But if the caller is a male and, on top of that, he's not a close friend, it's probably a hint of the danger and violence to come.

Then, suppose the caller is a girl, what then?

And if you were suddenly called out by a girl you've never met before, what then?

It's unlikely any guy would consider this a dangerous situation. In contrast, the majority of guys would instead hurry there excitedly with naive anticipation, wouldn't they?

Jyuuzawa Jyuu had no real reason to consider these points, because the letter placed in his shoe cupboard specified only the time and location, and---

"There is something I would like to talk about no matter what."

Just this simple sentence as a postscript.

The writing was elegant, giving the reader the impression that it might be the penmanship of a girl, but that was all there was to it.

Even if the letter is written by a girl, the person waiting there did not necessarily have to be a girl.

Although he had no problem ignoring it, Jyuu was free after classes, so he headed over in the direction of the specified gym. From experience, when he was being called out in this manner, eight or nine times out of ten there'd be a large crowd of people waiting there. Besides being lynched, he couldn't come up with any other reason for choosing a location that was out of the way. Besides, it was not the first time he had encountered this kind of situation.

Jyuu felt that meeting a challenge head-on was only appropriate course of action for a delinquent.

If there was something he worried about, it would be matters like how many people were gathered there and what kind of weapons they had.

But Jyuu guessed wrongly.

Behind the gym was a great tree. A sakura tree over 200-years old that was here long before this school was even established. Waiting under the tree that would be forgotten until next year, now that all the blossoms had already fallen, was a single girl.

Looking from a distance, Jyuu had no recollection of that girl whatsoever.

Then, could it be... that?

Even Jyuu realised the implications of being called out by a girl in such a manner. And he immediately dismissed the notion as absolutely idiocy.

For a member of the opposite sex to have feelings about him-no, rather, for him to think of this girl in that manner was absolute idiocy. Though, it was possible that he was jumping to conclusions too quickly.

He surveyed the surroundings; there was no one besides the girl. It seemed she wasn't being used as bait by people who wanted to ridicule Jyuu, with others hiding somewhere to watch the ensuing drama.

In any case, Jyuu decided to chat first with that girl.

When she noticed Jyuu coming, the girl pulled herself erect, as though she were a little nervous, then walked over to Jyuu. The girl was a full two heads shorter than the tall Jyuu, and her build was also fairly slender.

Her shiny, jet-black hair flowing down to the middle of her back was beautiful, but her fringe was unusually long, making it impossible to read her expressions. From the colour of the scarf of her uniform, Jyuu could tell she, like him, was a second year student at the private Sakuragiri Senior High School.

Standing face-to-face with her, Jyuu scoured his memories hard but still could not draw any recollections of her.

I should probably ask for her name first.

"You..."

"You must be Jyuuzawa Jyuu-sama?"

"...Yeah, well, that's me I guess."

Jyuu winced a little at the girl's respectful manner of speech.

Jyuuzawa Jyuu-sama?

Why call me '-sama'?

This girl continued speaking to Jyuu, who had put up his guard.

"I have been waiting for you for a long time."

"Ah, really..."

"I've always wanted to see you."

"Uh, just what're you..."

He hadn't finished, but the girl suddenly knelt before him.

As far as Jyuu was aware, this action was typically taken when one wasn't feeling well.

Maybe she was so nervous it made her feel ill?

Just as Jyuu was considering whether or not to pat her pack to comfort her a little, the girl maintained her kneeling position, lifted her head and said, "My body is your property. My heart is your slave. My King, Jyuuzawa Jyuu-sama. I pledge my eternal allegiance to you."

Then, the girl lowered her face to the speechless Jyuuzawa's feet, and touched her lips to the tip of his sneaker.

Without even thinking, Jyuuzawa immediately leapt back.

It was just a 951 yen cheap cloth sneaker-she actually dared to kiss it?

What slave? What allegiance? What kind of alien language was she speaking?

"...W-what're you doing?"

"I am Jyuu-sama's servant."

""Servant'? What d'you mean, 'servant'?"

"It means someone who works for Jyuu-sama."

"What d'you mean, 'work'?"

"Anything at all."

She was speaking the same language, and he also understood what she was saying.

But, Jyuu felt it was pointless continuing the conversation.

The reason was simple: this girl was on a completely different mental wavelength from him.

Jyuu turned his back on the girl and legged it out of there at full speed.

He heard the girl's voice calling him stop, but Jyuu pretended he didn't hear her.

Without a second glance, he sprinted out of the school gate in the direction of the train station.

This was the first time in his life Jyuzawa Jyuu had fled in such panic.

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The next day, in the classroom where the fourth period had just ended, Jyuu gave a big yawn.

Jyuu's seat was by the window in the far-end corner of the classroom.

Ever since he began sitting there in the first term of secondary two, it naturally became the fixed seat for Jyuu.

There was no real reason for it. It was simply because his classmates felt that fellows who were a nuisance should be placed off to one side insofar as was possible. One could also say what you can't see can't hurt you.

As for Jyuu, he didn't mind this sort of treatment and so put up with it.

Although it's a common saying not to judge a book by its cover, as far as one could see, external appearances still had an impact on one's judgement.

Most students either became wary or possibly uncomfortable upon seeing this Jyuzawa Jyuu teen.

His blonde-dyed hair and rough speech kept the others at arm's length. He was tall, and his physique was quite impressive in itself. His strong-willed expression made him look the type who liked a good brawl.

This was the recipe of disaster-from day one at school, Jyuu had caught the eye of the upper-classmen group and was taken along to a location safe from teachers' eyes. The table-tennis room that seemed to be populated by phantom members had become the gathering place for these guys. The upper-classman had said 'join the group', but Jyuu heard this as excuse for 'admit your defeat'.

The two phrases weren't actually that much different.

Jyuu replied to this with a punch, and with that, a scuffle broke out. Fortunately or not so fortunately, this one incident never reached the ears of the teachers. While Jyuu had two of his ribs broken, the four upper-classmen were left face-down on the floor. So it was probably difficult for them to come out in the open and admit what had happened, if they wanted to preserve some semblance of dignity.

Although the teachers remained blissfully unaware, rumours of this matter spread among the students in secret. With details being omitted with every re-telling, Jyuu's image became warped without needing any embellishment.

The teenager called Jyuuzawa Jyuu was a guy who attacked and bit indiscriminately like a rabid dog.

And so during that one year, people around him maintained a respectful distance, and the situation remained unchanged even going into his second year.

In this interval, Jyuu sparked off many brawls, reinforcing the rumours, which were already common knowledge among the students.

As such, the class treated him with great caution, and he too was able to understand their behaviour.

Jyuu never had any desire to chatter and hang out with friends or to participate in club activities, so he wasn't bothered by this treatment.

He felt that being free from human relations was a surprisingly pleasant feeling.

With the majority of his classmates at the school cafeteria and the remainder scattered around the classroom with their lunches laid out at the centre of their little groups, Jyuu shifted his gaze to outside the window.

At any rate, what was with yesterday...?

The hell was up with that girl I met after class yesterday?

Even if she was making fun of me, I don't get the point-it was so nonsensical.

The lingering haze of questions had been churning away somewhere in some part of his mind, even when he was dozing off in class.

Following from this, there's still bound to be someone asking for a fight.

Ah well, guess I'll forget about it...

Let's just treat it as a meeting with a weird girl.

The deep contemplation ended. Jyuu took out his lunch from his bag.

"Ah--! Jyuu-kun, not another guy bento again!"

Jyuu turned to look where the high-pitched voice was calling from with a reluctant expression.

"Shuddap. Don't just go around calling other people's food measly."

"Then let's do this. I present you with one of my mini-hamburgers."

"I don't want it. Or rather, watcha trying to say?"

"In exchange, I shall take this pickled radish."

"Like I said, watcha trying to say?!"

"I love pickled stuff, that's what I'm saying."

This girl skilfully evading the bluntness of Jyuu's speech was his classmate, Satsuki Miya.

Those who could socialise with Jyuu without becoming nervous were few and far between.

"Is your name pronounced as Jyuuzawa Jun? It's easy to remember, isn't it? Nice to meet you, Jyuu-kun."

She said this the day after they became classmates in the second year.

This girl was the only person in this school who called herself Jyuu's friend, and was an extremely difficult opponent for him to handle. A brief glare from Jyuu was sufficient to scare just about any student into silence, yet Miya met this with a smile.

"This pickled radish is delicious. I love the crunchy sound."

"...You just took my side dish without ask-"

"My mini-hamburger is delicious too, isn't it? Yup, it's a dish I have great confidence in."

Pressured by that smiling face, Jyuu unwillingly took the mini-hamburger from Miya and popped into his mouth.

It was indeed delicious. But he had no intention of voicing such an opinion. Neither did Miya expect him to, asking Jyuu nothing of the sort.

Jyuu's lunch consisted of onigiris. He made them himself, so there was nothing inside. The only accompaniments were the few slices of pickled radish set down next to them. When she first saw this bento, Miya enquired, 'You have this every day?', and Jyuu replied, 'This is enough for a guy'.

Miya had been calling this a guy bento ever since.

He had the slight impression that she was treating him like an idiot, but it was probably not the case, going by this girl's character.

If Jyuu was the student most cut off by others the class, then Miya was the complete opposite. She was a girl who could chatter freely to anyone, her smile and characteristic cheerfulness banishing all wariness from those conversing with her. The usual lie of 'everyone in class are my friends' wouldn't be too far from truth when used to describe her.

She was stunning, drawing people's eyes with her beauty, and rumour had it countless boys had confessed to her. Even now, she was still available, and her stubborn refusal to obtain a boyfriend was one of the major contributing factors to her popularity.

She's probably got a charitable mindset, Jyuu thought.

He could not grasp the true motives of this girl, who was able to socialise with even a guy like himself in such a light-hearted manner. Initially he was just plain bewildered, but now he accepted it. She probably felt sorry for him, being excluded by the class. Rather than disprove her belief that he would be lonely, Jyuu instead felt a little grateful.

Unless she spoke with him, the times when Jyuu would go through school without even saying a word would become much more frequent.

“Is it really cool for you to hang around here?”

“Why not?”

“Plenty of people must’ve asked you to join them for lunch, right?”

“Today is for socialising with Jyuu.”

“...Well, s’not like I mind.”

The sight of Satsuki Miya and himself having lunch together would almost certainly draw animosity from those around them. Just as he expected, every single person in class, albeit the majority were guys, was glowering at Jyuu.

In particular, the glare from the class representative, Fujishima Kanako, was sharp as a weapon. If it was that girl, she was probably thinking that Jyuu was taking advantage of Miya’s good nature. Fujishima Kanako could not tolerate the existence of delinquents like Jyuu, or another way of putting it would be that she viewed them as enemies. Behind the black plastic-framed glasses, her eyes burned with a sense of duty that loathed wrong-doing. She was diligent and earnest to the bone, but she was in no way a study freak, and this trait alone meant Jyuu did not dislike this girl either.

Whatever, they can do as they like-with this thought, Jyuu quickly polished off his lunch.

He stood up from his seat, while Miya was only through with two-thirds of her bento.

“Uwah, isn’t this a little mean of you, Jyuu-kun?”

“I need the toilet.”

With an easy wave of a hand, Jyuu walked out of the classroom.

He couldn't sleep with Miya around, so he started looking, wondering 'is there some place that's quiet?'.

Just as Jyuu was thinking 'The roof's gonna be surprisingly packed, won't it?', he stopped, noticing a figure coming from the end of the corridor.

Completely disregarding other students, making a beeline straight towards him-a short girl.

It was that girl he had met after class yesterday.

Without thinking, Jyuu's body started running in the opposite direction. Slipping between the students standing in the way along the corridor, he charged straight down the stairs. Ever since he was young, Jyuu had been confident in his own athletic abilities and hardly ever fell down. Brushing past students close enough to make their eyes bulge, he nimbly descended to the first floor, and he continued running into the gym in the same manner. He came here because he could not think of anywhere else to go, but now that he thought it, they met here yesterday, so maybe it was not such a good idea after all.

Well, at least I've earned myself a little time.

"...Even so, what's that gal want?"

He had run away without thinking, but it was not like the girl necessarily wanted to inflict harm on him.

It was just that he didn't feel comfortable not knowing her true intentions. Jyuu's friendships always ended catastrophically, and even among his own year there were many faces he didn't know, so he had even less of a clue as to which class that girl belonged to.

Seeing as Miya knows so many people, she'll probably know who she is, right?

I'll ask her indirectly afterwards...

"So you were here."

Even though she hadn't said very much, for some reason, the girl's voice was deeply imprinted in Jyuu's memory.

Jyuu looked back, to see the girl making her way towards him.

He had put all his effort into running, yet the girl didn't look tired at all from chasing after him.

Her speech, coupled with her mannerisms, both struck Jyuu's spine as extremely creepy.

"Y-you, why're you chasing after me...?"

"I am the knight who serves under Jyuu-sama. So it is only natural for me to be at your side."

She had added the word 'knight' today. He had thought that yesterday's lines were perhaps some kind of joke, he really did hope that was the case, but the girl behaved the same way she did yesterday.

Feeling a strange pressure emanating from the rapidly approaching girl, Jyuu once again spun around away from her.

The rest of the lunch break was spent in this fashion, playing an unproductive game of catch.

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After class that day, Jyuu quickly prepared to head home. He had somehow managed to get away during lunch, but if he stayed in the classroom he sensed the girl would come after him again.

"Jyuu-kun, cleaning duty!"

"Sorry."

Saying just this word as parting to Miya, he raced out hurriedly, and only relaxed when he was out of the school gates.

Somehow I didn't get caught today, but what'll happen tomorrow?

In the first place, why did I have to run away anyway?

I totally don't get that girl's objectives or her ulterior motives for approaching me, so it's downright creepy of her.

If it's someone who offended me, I'll just beat them up.

But that girl's just bizarre and all she's done is to weird me out, so there's nothing I can do.

“Come to think of it, I forgot to ask Miya...”

“Who is this Miya?”

“Woah!”

At some unknown point in time-he really didn't know exactly when-the girl had walked up right next Jyuu's side.

Facing Jyuu, who had instinctively put himself on guard, the girl bowed her head politely.

“Forgive me. I did not intend to startle Jyuu-sama.”

Jyuu had thought that he had sharper senses than other people, but he didn't notice her at all.

This girl can erase all traces of her own presence?

Although it won't be all that surprising if she really can pull it off.

“Why do you keep following me around...?”

“Because Jyuu-sama is my master.”

Jyuu felt that he had to change his line of questioning.

To one where she could give some common sense answers.

“...What's your name?”

It was an extremely normal question, but the girl clapped her hands together in admiration.

She spoke as though it had never occurred to her.

“Pardon my tardy introduction. The name I go by in this present life is Ochibana Ame.”

“Ochibana Ame...?”

A surname of 'falling blossoms', and a name of 'rain'.

It was not a name he familiar with, and a weird one at that.

Ochibane Ame showed him her student handbook, proving this was indeed her actual name.

“...I see, I know your name now. But what d’you mean by ‘this present life’?”

“By that I mean my name in my current life.”

Jyuu thought, ‘She must be some kind of idiot’, but he could hardly stop here, so he went with the flow.

If he didn’t do that, the conversation would never progress.

“...U---m, so it’s that. So you must also have some kind of past-life name, right?”

“Yes.”

“By the way, what kind of name was it?”

Frankly, he didn’t care a whit about it, but he asked for the sake of furthering the conversation.

Jyuu was getting this girl to talk a little bit more, so he could find out about her motives.

“Unfortunately, it is not something that can be pronounced in this present life.”

“Wuh?”

“I believe it has to do with our vocal cords. The world too has changed, so I’m afraid there’s nothing we can do about it.”

He couldn’t get her at all.

But in order to carry on the conversation, Jyuu ignored the minor details.

“Explain, why do you keep following me around?”

“Just as I had stated earlier, it’s because...”

“I don’t get that stuff. Explain it in a way that I understand. If you can’t do that, don’t ever let me see you again.”

Jyuu gave a glare as he spoke, but Ame nodded her head without being the slightest bit fazed by it.

“Understood. Then I shall explain it in the simplest possible way.”

Her explanation required a full five minutes.

If this was simple, just how long would the detailed version take?

After hearing her speak, Jyuu only had two thoughts.

Firstly, how great it'd be if he didn't have to listen, or rather, regret.

And that the girl's mind worked in weird ways, or rather, conviction.

According to her, Jyuu appeared to have a master-servant relationship with her in their previous lives. Jyuu was a great king, and she his loyal subordinate. On the stage that was a vast continent, Jyuu lived a life of drama and turmoil, with her as the constant companion at his side. She described some incidents that had happened in the strange story, but Jyuu stopped listening half-way through.

The past lives she spoke about were set in the olden days thousands of years ago. They had supposedly played active roles determining the course of history for the continent with a tongue-twister name, in a world where swords, magic and monsters ran amok. Just hearing this was enough to give him a headache, and his brain refused to take in any of this information.

Forget about wanting to decipher all that-even ignoring it took a great deal of effort.

What was ironic was that this girl called Ochibana Ame enunciated words clearly, even though there wasn't much intonation in her voice. While listening to her talk, he was assailed by a feeling that he was somehow being eaten away by something invisible, and Jyuu gave a small shudder.

With that, he came to a conclusion.

This girl, Ochibana Ame, was weird in the head.

She was the type of person who spoke about hallucinations like they were real, and forced others to believe in them as well. The type that are called [denpa](#)*.

This took up way too much time, but he had no clue as to how to proceed from here.

“And that concludes my explanation.”

Jyuu gave a hard stare at Ame, who was surrounded with an air of satisfaction at having finished her speech.

“So you’re following me around because of this stupid hallucination?”

“No, everything just now is the truth. I solemnly do swear so to god.”

Which god are you swearing to?

Jyuu stepped closer to Ame.

“You, get lost already.”

“...Could it be, your memories haven’t returned yet?”

“There never were any to begin with.”

“This is shocking. This might well be the result of someone’s conspiracy...”

“You, get lost already.”

Jyuu seized Ame by her collar and pulled her face close.

From between the gaps of her gloomy fringe, Ame’s eyes looked up at him without blinking.

“Don’t drag me into your stupid delusions. Secondly, leave me alone. Stay away. I don’t wanna see you.”

Ame said nothing and just gazed into Jyuu’s eyes.

A long moment’s silence passed.

Jyuu released her collar roughly, and Ame was thrust away.

Without meeting the eyes of the girl who had fallen onto her backside, he left.

This time, he didn’t hear anyone calling him to stop from behind.

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On the apartment elevator, Jyuu pressed the ninth floor button and rested his back against the wall.

The elevator stopped at a floor on the way up and a woman appearing to be a housewife made to step in, but immediately backed out. She probably thought it was dangerous upon seeing Jyuu’s unconcealed displeasure painted all over his face. Recently, things were such that it wouldn’t be strange if there were elevator-murders, so it was better to be safe than sorry.

Reaching the ninth floor, Jyuu exited the elevator, turned right and stopped in front of the door at the end of the corridor, where he took out his keys. The lock opened, and he entered the house without saying a word. He took off his shoes in the pitch-black entryway, and headed to his room without turning on the lights. He dumped his bag onto his bed, stripped off his school uniform and went to the toilet to wash his face. It was indeed too dark, so he turned on the lights, and when he saw his own reflection in the mirror, he agreed with the earlier housewife's judgement.

I see, no wonder she ran away...

Right now, his expression made him seem like he really wanted to punch someone. Although he believed he was the cool-headed type, his face always gave away his feelings, a trait that could either be a strength or weakness. To relieve himself of his irritation, he tossed his shirts into the washing machine. Leaving his torso bare, he took out a carton of milk from the fridge and drank straight from it. He drew one of the dining table chairs towards him, eased himself onto it and switched from listening to the background music to watching TV. On the screen, people were chattering about boring topics like what kind of weather heralds the coming of summer.

Jyuu set the empty milk carton on top of the table, letting his whole body relax.

Should I just sleep here like this?

Since it doesn't matter anyway.

Because the people who're supposed to tell me off aren't here in this house.

Jyuu couldn't remember when his parents started fighting with each other anymore. Ever since he was a child, any mutual love Jyuu thought they must had when they married had cooled considerably. He had seen the two quarrel right in front of him countless times, and about the time when Jyuu himself was thinking, 'enough already, I'm sick of this', his father left. He had another woman. This was supposedly the reason for their squabbling, but truth was his mother too had another man.

It didn't matter-both the quarrelling parties were guilty.

His father was the kind of person who never really cared about his son, neither

loving nor hating him-it was complete, utter indifference. His mother was an unbelievably moody person, alternating between gentleness bordering on stupidity and heartlessly cruel sternness. Jyuu felt fairly proud of himself, having grown up into a relatively decent person despite all the ruckus. Because he didn't want to stay at home in that environment, he had studied fairly hard at school. The result was that he made it onto the waiting list and got into a marginally better than average private high school located in the town centre.

His parents gave no response whatsoever to this. They did pay for the school fees, so they probably knew that their son was somewhere in high school. It was anyone's guess how many years it's been since his father returned to this place, and his mother too hardly ever came home.

It seemed she was living at her lover's place.

"Is that place really such a comfortable place to live in?"

Only once did he ask this question of his mother. This was when his mother returned to collect her clothes and jewellery and such. You would think that, when asked such a question by your son, you would at least say a few words to defend yourself, but his mother said nothing at all. The corner of her mouth twisted a little, an expression that seemed to laugh at Jyuu for asking such a stupid question. His mother had given birth to him at a rather early age, and even now she still looks rather youthful, so seeing her expression then made him all the more furious.

Oh well, it wasn't much of an important story.

Jyuu sunk these kinds of memories keep within his heart. To prevent them from re-emerging the second time, he sunk them with something immensely heavy. And the name of this immensely heavy object was 'I can't be bothered to think about it'.

He absently shifted his gaze to the television, just as they were broadcasting news on some kind of incident. It seemed an armed robbery gang had attacked a jewellery shop, and they escaped after killing all the employees. Besides that, there was a drug addict wielding an edged object who barged into a nursery and holed up there, and an arson case where student suffering exam-stress spread gasoline around the classroom and set it on fire. Adding to that, they also

reported that yet another person had fallen victim to the serial phantom killer, who had killed in countless victims in the past few months. Nothing but the normal fare of a steadily corrupting world.

Jyuu immediately switched channels, to a random variety program, then lazily got to his feet. He picked a ramen from the large quantity of instant food he had stocked up on, filled the kettle with water and set it to boil. It was not that he couldn't cook-he felt he could cook pretty well for guys of his own age.

When Jyuu was young, his mother was the type of person who only cooked when she felt like it. In terms of probability, it would be around once in every four days. Inevitably, this meant that the remainder were made up of bentos bought from the supermarket of the convenience stores, and when he had eaten his fill of them, Jyuu started cooking himself.

Recently, even that became too much of a hassle, and he almost never bothered cooking anymore. The reason why he made onigiri for lunch was simply because they were cheap. And he moulded the onigiri so well, Miya had thought that Jyuu's mother had made them.

He knew he had lost something that could not be seen with the eye ever since his parents left home. Describing something as 'that which couldn't be seen with the eye' was very sly indeed. It seemed to him that if something had form, one could remember it, but if it was formless, then memory itself and will to remember would definitely disappear.

When he noticed that he started hoping for something, Jyuu as usual sunk it deep into the innermost recesses of his heart. Carefully. Firmly.

While watching the variety show, he thought up of something completely unrelated.

About that girl, Ochibana Ame.

It was only natural to forcefully reject being dragged into such stupid hallucinations, so Jyuu didn't feel the slightest bit guilty about that.

But there was something that surprised him a little.

When they met each other's gazes in the silence. He had thought that those types of people had eyes that were either eerily clear or dark and muddy, one of

the two.

As for her, that girl's eyes were neither of the two.

He felt that they were remarkably calm, without a single trace of fearing Jyuu, rational.

Someone with those eyes voicing such ridiculous hallucinations. This irreconcilable gap between the two preyed on his thoughts. Having said that, there was no way he would ever reconsider her claims.

Jyuu hated fantasy things like magic or past lives.

Forget understanding, or wanting to understand-he didn't even want to think about it.

"Well, whatever..."

The water had boiled, so he poured it into the cup to cook the ramen. By the time he finished eating, Jyuu was already watching and laughing along with the TV. Not over-thinking anything was Jyuu's secret towards living a happy life.

Of course, he didn't think too deeply about the reason for that.

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"Jyuu-kun, you owe me a favour, okay?"

The next morning, Miya came to Jyuu's seat before classes started and said that abruptly.

Her arms crossed in front of her chest, Miya looked angry about something.

"A favour-what for?"

"Yesterday's cleaning duty."

"Aah, you're covering for me, is that what you're talking about?"

"That's exactly it. In exchange for one of your onigiris from your guy bento, I'll forgive you."

"Then does that mean if I make onigiris for you, you'll keep taking over cleaning for me?"

"I'm not that cheap, you know."

“It’s one onigiri, right?”

“Depends on the current market price.”

Conveniently pretending not to hear Miya’s baffling sentence, Jyuu suddenly thought of something.

If it’s her, she would probably know, won’t she.

Because she appeared to have achieved her plan to befriend a hundred people.

“You know...”

Just as he was starting to speak, he noticed that the better half of his classmates were all looking in his direction.

Satsuki Miya really was very popular.

So it wasn’t unusual for her to attract attention when she spends a long time talking to people like Jyuu since the morning.

After confirming that there was still time in the home room period, Jyuu left his seat, pulling at Miya’s hand. Miya, who didn’t resist much, followed Jyuu and the two moved to the end of the corridor. There were still students looking their way, but they were few.

Jyuu went straight into the point with his question.

“You know a student called Ochibana Ame? A second-year girl.”

“Ochibana...? Would her first name be ‘rain’ by any chance?”

“So you do know about her.”

He had only thought that Miya, who had a wide friendship circle, would know the names of virtually all the people in the same year, but that really seemed to be the case.

Miya gave a ‘yup, I do’ nod of a head.

“But we’re not friends. We’re in a completely different class, and I’ve not spoken to her directly. But I noticed her name while browsing the year name list, since it’s an unusual name. I did try enquiring the people who’re in the same class as Ochibana-san about her.”

“What kinda girl is she?”

“U---m, most of what I know is rumour though?”

“That’s fine.”

“Say, why do you want to know about Ochibana-san?”

“There’s no need for you to know.”

“Uwah, how unreasonable.”

“Yeah, yeah, just talk.”

“So I’m an easy girl, am I now....”

After giving a light sigh of disbelief, Miya spoke about her.

In this school, there was a class composed of the students who scored the top grades in their entrance exams. There was only one of this so-called progressive class among the thirteen classes. Students were shuffled in and out of this class at the beginning of every school year according to their grades, but Ochibana Ame was enrolled in this class. The progressive class was a great distance away from Jyuu’s classroom and it was even on a different floor, so he almost never bumped into those students.

Almost like there was an invisible threshold in the way, it was a classroom Jyuu would never dream of approaching.

“Ochibana-san’s really smart, you know.”

According to Miya, Ochibana Ame appeared to rank among the top five in the year. The summarised opinions of this girl was that she was a ‘gloomy honours student’. In class, she hardly ever opened her mouth unless the teacher specifically said her name in questions, and she never chatted to anyone. She had no close friends, and she didn’t set out to seek friendship either.

She seemed the type of girl who completely closed off herself in her own world. A boring person who simply just blended into the class, being unobtrusive and harmless. No one hated her, but at the same time, no one liked her. Like himself, she would never proactively speak to someone.

Putting together Miya’s descriptions gave such an impression of the girl.

“Incidentally, she doesn’t have a boyfriend. Good for you, isn’t it?”

“Don’t suspect me of something like that. I just thought I’d ask out of interest.”

“Interest, is it now?”

“Like I said, don’t suspect me of something like that.”

At that exact moment, the school bell chimed and the conversation ended there, and the two returned to the classroom.

Blanking out the voice of the home room teacher who was informing the class of news, Jyuu pondered.

If Miya was right, then Ochibana Ame was a student whose existence was as thin as a shadow. The image Jyuu had of her was totally different from this. ‘At the very least, she’s got a solid presence that can’t be forgotten after seeing her the first time’, he thought.

Her forceful aura and hallucinations are way too powerful.

Didn’t anyone else know about her other side?

-

Did she give up after being shouted at yesterday? Ochibana Ame did not appear in both break time and lunch break.

Although Jyuu felt a little let down, he thought, ‘Ah well, my troubles and misfortunes have passed’. If it was a simple quarrel then he’d be fine, but it was incomprehensible stuff like that he wanted to avoid. Thinking about others gave him the unpleasant feeling of his heart being eaten away. So there was nothing better than never having to meet her again.

The day-end homeroom class finished, and Jyuu hurried to go home. Because he crammed almost all the text books across all subjects into his desk, his bag was close to flat, and light as well. Dangling it on a finger, he left the classroom, ignoring Miya calling for him to stop. Going along with flow of students who didn’t participate in club activities, he changed his shoes at the shoe rack and left through the school gate.

The early June sky was still light, and a little blue sky could still be seen. Jyuu

headed towards the station while absently gazing around at the streets. He didn't process the visual data, he didn't input anything into his memory-he just looked.

The ads for the new items on sale put up over the shop front of a convenience store. The magazines lined up at the fore of a bookshop. The crowds of female students gathered around the old-fashioned but still popular candy store. There were people talking on their cell phones while walking, and also those who were texting.

Jyuu's mind remained blank while seeing all this.

He thought that being in a state of thoughtlessness was great. By simply just living, one would experience for an instant the sense of living. This way, one's life would end without one realising, and surely this should be a happy thing*. It would sure be lucky to go straight to heaven in the blink of an eye without any worries in mind.

- some repetition here: 'one's life would end without one realising, and surely one should be happy to die without noticing it'

Though such a thing would be highly unlikely.

Police officers on patrol glared at Jyuu like they were looking at something filthy as they walked past. With the rise in crime, the dignity of the police force had fallen, so they probably wanted to recover it. Jyuu's outward appearance meant police officers were always keeping an eye on him, but he had no ill intentions so he didn't pay much attention to them.

Thanks for your hard work, Jyuu thought as he gave a big yawn, when he happened to glance at the display window of a nearby shop.

And there he saw the reflection of the person walking two meters behind him.

Jyuu's consciousness processed this and matched it with his memory.

In that moment, his yawn turned into a sigh.

"...Oi."

Without stopping and without looking back, Jyuu muttered quietly.

“Yes, what is the matter, Jyuu-sama?”

The girl walking behind him, Ochibana Ame, answered tonelessly.

He had thought that she’d have learned her lesson yesterday, but the girl didn’t seem at all affected.

Didn’t I tell you that I never wanted to see you again?!

Do you even freakin’ understand Japanese?!

A variety of rebukes flashed through his head, but Jyuu didn’t utter a single one of them.

Because he could tell it was useless.

Just as he had heard from Miya, this girl was quite strange.

He couldn’t go wrong thinking of her as ‘one of the eccentric oddballs’.

In that case, he couldn’t reach an understanding with her no matter how many logical arguments he produced.

Because people like her imposed whatever rules they liked on themselves and lived accordingly.

That sort of selfishness was simply something delinquency had no way of competing with.

“Y’ sure are good at finding me, aren’cha ?”

Of course, Jyuu had expected this. He felt that it would be dangerous after classes ended, which was precisely why he chose to mingle in with the other students during the peak hour when leaving school.

Ame’s reply was simple.

“There’s no way I could miss your mane of shining hair, Jyuu-sama.”

His mane of shining hair was probably referring to Jyuu’s blonde-dyed hair.

Jyuu was tall to begin with, and together with this kind of hair colour, he certainly stuck out like a sore thumb.

Sakuragiri High School was rather lax on the rules, but although there were a lot of students with dyed brown hair, there were no other students who had

blonde hair. Because a lot of students believed that if they were to dye their hair blonde, it would be tantamount to challenging Jyuu to a fight.

“That radiance is proof that Jyuu-sama’s kingship.”

‘This is dyed, you friggen retard,’ he wanted to say, but Jyuu forced himself to hold back his words.

...Proof of kingship, huh.

Although Jyuu hadn’t much given much thought about what to do when he got home, he now made up his mind.

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The next morning. People started chattering among themselves upon seeing Jyuu step into the classroom.

Fully aware of why they reacted this way, Jyuu sat in his seat with a calm look on his face. Although everyone kept glancing his way, not a single person ventured to speak to him directly. Even Fujishima Kanako, who was reading a novel, stiffened and her eyes widened in surprise.

Miya, who as usual popped up in classroom running a little late, asked Jyuu on behalf of the entire class, “What’s with your hair?”

“Is it weird?”

“Not really, but we’re just a little taken aback. It’s so sudden.”

As Miya stared hard at Jyuu’s head, she ‘hmm’ed in thought.

Jyuu’s hair had become black.

It was just a simple matter of dropping by his regular salon and getting it dyed again on his way home yesterday, but anyone would be surprised to see his hair, which had been blonde ever since he entered school, suddenly turn black.

Even Jyuu himself couldn’t get used to it when he looked himself in the mirror this morning.

“Why this sudden change of heart?”

“No reason. Well, it’s something like camouflage.”

“From who?”

“A stalker.”

“Eh? A stalker?”

Miya tilted her head to one side, an eager look in her eyes, but before long, she grinned.

“Well, I don’t know the details, but you look cool in black.”

“You’re the one with the pretty hair.”

“...Ohh, Jyuu-kun praised me.”

“It’s lip service.”

“Aw, I was complimenting you...”

Miya looked unhappy for some reason, but the homeroom teacher entered the classroom at this moment, so she returned to her seat.

As expected, the teacher was struck dumb when he saw Jyuu. Nakamizo, the homeroom teacher of Jyuu’s class, was a married man in his late forties with kids, and the type who respected student’s freedom. As the head teacher of Jyuu’s grade, he would drop hints about Jyuu’s attitude, but on the whole he was a fairly tolerant person.

He seemed to think that Jyuu’s black hair was one step in the right direction, and perhaps because he realised it wouldn’t do to put too much pressure on a student who had just decided to turn over a new leaf, he didn’t mention the subject and got down to the task of passing on any messages from school for the day.

So you think that just because my hair colour’s changed, I’ve changed as a person?

Although this was what Jyuu thought, he kept the real reason behind the change to himself.

This was a tactic to escape from the clutches of that girl, Ochibana Ame. It was a tactic he came up with when he heard from her that she used his blonde hair as a kind of landmark after class yesterday.

So that should be the end of getting tailed by that person.

She should lose heart now that I've lost the 'proof of kingship', or whatever the hell it was.

Sure feels good.

When it hit the lunch break after morning classes ended, Jyuu quickly wolfed down his lunch and stepped out of the classroom, brushing aside even Miya's call for him. He wasn't really going anywhere; it was just that if he loitered around the classroom, he would probably run into Ochibana Ame. Jyuu snickered at the thought of Ame's reaction when she saw him.

And then, the girl made her appearance.

Turning the corner around the corridor, she spotted Jyuu and headed straight for him. Jyuu pretended not to notice her, and instead gazed outside the window.

Ame came up to Jyuu's side and stood there, still as a doll.

"Jyuu-sama, you called for me?"

"...Call you? Me?"

"I sensed that you were calling for me, Jyuu-sama."

Without the slightest desire to enquire exactly how or what she sensed, Jyuu cut straight into the heart of the matter.

"Never mind that, what'd you think of this?"

As he said this, he pointed to his hair.

"Now I've got nothing to do you anymore, right?"

"What do you mean?"

"What, you say... Are you blind or something?"

"You have dyed your hair black. It suits you."

"No, that's it. Now my proof is gone, right?"

"Proof?"

"Proof of kingship. Isn't that what you said yesterday?"

He hated having to talk about it, but Jyuu suppressed his dislike of the entire topic and continued.

“Didn’t you say my blonde hair was your proof? So, now I...”

“What does the colour of hair have to do with anything?”

“...Huh?”

“The proof that Jyuu-sama is my King is your soul. That noble radiance is absolutely unmistakable.”

I’m too naïve.

Jyuu was genuinely astonished by his own naivety.

This Ochibana Ame girl was more hardcore crackpot than Jyuu had imagined.

She would rewrite her theories anytime to suit her needs.

‘If X, then Y’, this ordinary line of logic didn’t seem to work on her.

“Jyuu-sama, your complexion doesn’t look good. Are you feeling unwell?”

Jyuu completely lost the will to escape from her, and that day, he was hounded by Ochibana Ame right up until classes ended for the day.

-

“For some reason, you’ve been acting real weird lately. Did something happen?”

“Even if it did, I don’t hafta tell you about it.”

“Uwah, it’s really hurtful when you say it that way.”

“The less you know about other people’s troubles, the better. Just leave me alone.”

“Is that a sign that you actually worry about me?”

“Don’t be stupid.”

At Jyuu’s careless response, Miya gave a shrug of her shoulder.

Jyuu hadn’t been able to relax in the slightest these few days, no thanks to the incessant tailing by that stalker girl, Ochibana Ame. Ame didn’t do anything in

particular, but just shadowed him everywhere.

Jyuu completely ignored her. There wasn't anything else he could do. Denying her delusional fantasies, dying his hair black, hollering at her in rage, all of it had failed.

It wasn't like he could go talk to the police about this.

Of course, there was also the option of turning her away with brute force, but Jyuu was against the idea of doing so. It wasn't that he had anything against hitting women, it's just that she had no ill intentions, and he felt it was unreasonable to react with violence when all she did was just follow him around. Frankly, for all his pretence of being a delinquent and all, he wasn't one in the slightest, and he felt rather miserable about it all.

In any case, there was no escaping from Ochibana Ame.

He really wanted to do something about this creepy woman.

Having been mentally driven into a corner, Jyuu wearily pondered about the strategy.

That day, Jyuu sprinted out of the classroom without any delay and took the rare initiative to speak to his seniors. A group of five, headed by the third-year Ihara, who had been held back for two years and was turning twenty this year. A five-some who were labelled as the black sheep of the school by all the teachers. Ever since Jyuu joined the school, they'd scuffled countless times, and currently they were in a truce.

Jyuu gathered up these acquaintances and invited them to go karaoke. The moment he heard it was going to be Jyuu's treat, Ihara gave a complacent smile. He likely took it as Jyuu's way of making amends. Jyuu's latest bout of switching away from blonde hair was probably taken as another indication of this change of heart. He seemed to think it wasn't half-bad to have cheeky junior finally cave in and treat him to some entertainment.

The satisfied senpais gave a collective, cool nod of their heads, and followed Jyuu into the city. Leaving the decision of which store to visit to his senpais, Jyuu casually glanced behind his back. Spotting the ever-present Ochibana Ame, he

cheered inside.

They entered the karaoke box that was opposite the train station away from school. Jyuu pitched into the conversation at all the right times and applauded his senpais' singing. He apologised for everything he'd done to date with his head bowed. And he bore all the beatings he got without a word.

All for the sake of the one goal he had in mind

Despite the fact that Jyuu and the others had come in their school uniforms, the karaoke box graciously served them alcohol. The fact that Jyuu and the others looked dangerous helped, but it was also a reflection of the times.

Jyuu, who was sipping at his beer, was offered some drugs but he refused them. They were living in an age where drugs that could make you forget reality with just three pills were being sold for a grade schooler's pocket money.

When Jyuu tried out drugs in the past, it was the worst experience of his life.

Certainly, all his troubles were wiped clean. However, once the drugs wore off, the whole of hateful reality came all crashing back down in one go with more force than ever.

Never again.

Even though he was constantly reminded about the downers of reality whilst living out a normal life, he had no desire to do anything to make things worse.

“The fuck, Jyuzawa, you don't do drugs?”

Ihara roared at Jyuu in a voice more befitting a middle aged man than a high schooler.

Despite getting a faceful of the stink of alcoholic breath, Jyuu forced a smile.

“Sorry, I don't dig that kinda stuff.”

“Fucking loser.”

Jyuu just let the wave of derisive laughter wash over him.

For what came afterwards.

Excusing himself to the toilet, Jyuu left the room. He headed down the stairs towards the exit, and from there, scanned through the crowds, looking for

Ochibana Ame.

And as he thought, she was still there.

She stood there, by the street light near the store, as though she was waiting for someone. She attracted looks from curious passers-by, but seeing that she was a plain Jane, not a single person even bothered approaching her.

The clock struck six, and the sky that had been overcast since dawn started turning dark.

It was about time.

Looking for all the world as though he hadn't noticed the rain, Jyuu went back upstairs.

Once he was back in the room, Jyuu struck up conversation with the senpais who were getting pretty drunk by now.

“Thing is, there's this stalker who's been a real pain...”

The conversation-starved senpais immediately lapped up his words.

He was being followed by a creepy girl. He was at a complete loss. He wanted to do something about it.

One of the senpais piped up, holding a cup of beer,

“Well, ain't dat like, y'know. Sumthin ya can solve with just two, three beatings?”

Another senpai interrupted.

“For bitches like that, just rape 'em and be done with it. That'll put 'em in their place, even if they hate yer guts after.”

Jyuu kept his silence in the midst of the senpais' storm of arguments.

And things progressed as expected.

The five senpais' concluded they'd do something about it.

Ihara, the leader of the lot, said roughly,

“Aright, just leave that bitch to us. We're doin' this for our great kouhai. We'll knock some sense into that bitch!”

Already whipped up to a high thanks to the alcohol and drunks, they got even more worked up after they listened to Jyuu.

“This is killin' two birds with one stone. We get all the fun, and you get to lose the problem,” Ihara declared with a laugh. Taking Jyuu's silence as assent, the five demanded for details of what the stalker woman looked like.

After giving a brief description of her characteristics, Jyuu added,

“She's here today as well. Yeah, that one there outside, her.”

The five exchanged looks, vulgar smiles hanging off their lips. In the blink of the eye, the five were already leaving the room. Jyuu watched them go in silence. He debated about whether he should finish his drink, but in the end he left the cup of beer as it was and headed to the cashier. He paid the bill, but didn't head out.

He'd heard rumours about Ihara and his gang. They were infamous for raping girls, and they seemed to have their ways of avoiding police detection. Ochibane would probably be dragged off somewhere and have the living daylight's raped out of her.

Jyuu hadn't a clue about what would happen afterwards or what would she do.

Jyuu wasn't the kind of person to enjoy watching that kind of stuff.

Seating himself on a sofa near the cashier used for waiting, he sat there with a cigarette in his mouth, bored out of his mind. It wasn't one of his own, but one he filched off one of the senpais. Leaving the cigarette dangling from his mouth unlit, he rested the back of his head against the wall and stared up at the filthy ceiling. The staff manning the cashier was glaring daggers at him, but he ignored them.

Jyuu didn't smoke. He pretended to because he'd be thought as a delinquent. As for why he didn't smoke, just remembering the reason was enough to make him feel pissed off.

Because both his parents were heavy smokers. The smell of cigarettes brought back nothing but hated memories.

The small TV installed next to the cashier was showing the sight of rainfall. The reporter on screen announced that a typhoon had come. Despite what it was like

inside the store, it seemed like it was coming down hard out there.

The senpais were probably taking Ochibane somewhere.

With this, the connection between him and the eyesore would be cut.

Once she'd been raped, the odds were more likely than not that she'd stop chasing after Jyuu.

It felt really refreshing to be free of an annoyance.

Even though it was unlit, the distinct smell of tobacco drifted from the cigarette hanging in his mouth. No matter what the brand, Jyuu just hated the smell of tobacco.

Ochibane should have seen me and the senpais enter the karaoke box together.

So if she gets assaulted by the senpais, she should full well know why.

That I was involved somehow.

What would that denpa girl think?

Would she think that I betrayed her?

Even if she was crazily delusional, she would think that, wouldn't she?

The cashier attendant changed the channel on the cable TV, but the screen still showed the endless torrent of rain. A caption running across the screen declared that the flood alert had been issued.

A betrayal was a tragedy stemming from the difference in the weight or intensity of feelings between two people.

No matter how deeply one person feels, there's always the case where the other side doesn't even hold a shred of sentiment for them.

Always, the one who felt more would get hurt.

Always, without exception.

When he was a kid, Jyuu was bullied. Bullied in the neighbourhood, bullied at school.

He didn't remember why, nor did he want to.

He didn't get any help from the teachers, but that was fine. Because he always believed that his parents would stand on his side, that his dad and mum would get angry for him. At one of the occasional dinners with his parents when they got off work, Jyuu finally aired the troubles that he had been weathering through.

Everyone is bullying me.

What should I do?

Dad, Mum, what should I do?

For the first and last time ever, he laid bare his true feelings.

Hearing that, his parents said nothing. They probably understood what Jyuu was saying. But in the end, they never displayed the reactions Jyuu had hoped for. Their expressions spoke said it all-their faces were twisted with clear displeasure, fed up of hearing a kid's nonsense. The dumbfounded Jyuu just sat there, hands gripping his knees with his head down as his half-eaten dinner was taken away. His parents quickly vacated their seats and each vanished into their separate rooms.

Jyuu lay in bed until late that night, tired but wide awake.

He didn't think he cried back then.

It was just that he had felt frustrated and miserable, even though he loved his parents, who only treated him tenderly when the fancy struck them, even though he would still continue loving them, even though he trusted them. He felt betrayed by those emotions. He hated himself for feeling that way, and he hated his hurt self for being so weak.

As this continued time and time again, he had probably grown numb to his emotions.

He didn't particularly care about getting betrayed-he was used to it.

However, he hated having to betray anyone.

He detested inflicting those feelings of his at the time on anyone.

Back then, he had decided it was the one and only thing he would hate.

Jyuu spat out the cigarette.

“...The hell am I doing? I'm such a fucking idiot!”

Jyuu pelted down the stairs at full speed and sprinted out of the store.

As expected, the rain was coming down in buckets. It felt like it was squeezing down on the world, constricting the range of vision and strangling the heart, making it hard to breathe. Looking around frantically as he ran, he pushed his way through the people, keeping his ears pricked for the sound of people's voices mixed in with the rain.

And he found them.

His senpais were making their way towards a deserted spot, in a manner that suggested that they were cornering someone.

Jyuu ran in that direction, picked up speed, and knocked down one of the senpais with a kick to the back of his hand.

And, turning to look back, was Ochibana Ame.

Her uniform was a complete mess, but she seemed untouched.

“Jyuzawa! You bastard, what the fuck are you doing?!”

Ihara bared his teeth threateningly at Jyuu.

And in that interval, the three others had already surrounded Jyuu.

Ame, who had been abandoned, got to her feet with a look of considerable bewilderment.

“Fucking explain yourself, Jyuzawa!”

“I take back what I said.”

“Huh?”

“That you should vent your frustrations on that idiot girl.”

Before he even finished speaking, Jyuu was already in action. As expected, one-on-four were pretty bad odds, but fortunately, the four were still recovering from drugs and their drunkenness, whereas Jyuu was pretty much sober. This was evident in their moves.

He planted a foot right into the abdomen of the senpai, whose belly was full of food and drink, and, as he pitched forward, Jyuu threw a punch against his jaw. One down. However, in that time, the other three were already grabbing at Jyuu from his left, his right and from behind him. In a group fight, it was all over the moment you were caught. As though trying to avoid getting caught in the downpour, Jyuu ducked low and kicked off the ground, slipping past the reaching hands. Intent of keeping his momentum, he lashed out a fist at one person's solar plexus, and swung his elbow hard against the temple of another, knocking both of them out.

In terms of brawling experience, the senpais and Jyuu were about the same level, but this was where differences in physical capabilities and mental fortitude made themselves all too clear. Jyuu was blessed with good body since birth and he always kept a cool head. As such, when it came down to a one-on-one fight, there was no doubt that it would result in Ihara's defeat.

When there was only one opponent, Jyuu had almost never lost.

Perhaps the drug-addled Ihara mistook Jyuu to be a monster-he gave a wail as he backed away.

“S-stay away!”

In the instant when Ihara made to flee, Jyuu closed the distance in the blink of an eye. One blow to the stomach, one to the jaw.

With just that, Ihara toppled over.

Vomit splattered everywhere, but he hadn't sustained any severe injuries.

As Jyuu heaved a sigh of relief, he suddenly remembered that there was just one person left-the very first senpai he had knocked down.

“Jyuzawa!”

Just as that person was about to land a blow on Jyuu, Ochibane Ame whirled behind him quickly. Ame swung the school bag in her hands struck him in the back of his head with its corner, as hard as she could. As her opponent staggered, she followed up with a kick to the groin. Without even needing Jyuu to lift a finger, the last person fainted, foaming at his mouth.

To the background of the groans of the five and the pitter-patter of falling rain, the two's eyes met.

Jyuu yanked on Ame's hand hard, snapping,

“Come.”

“Yes, my lord.”

It'd probably turn out to be a tiring discussion.

Jyuu gave a wry smile in his heart, but he didn't feel the slightest bit displeased.

The senpais were incapacitated for the moment, but it was possible that passers-by who witnessed the scene would report the fight. There had been an increase in patrolling police officers recently, and they were cracking down hard. There was no tolerance even if the suspects were students. Thinking it'd be a pain if they got tied up with the police, Jyuu quickly flagged down a taxi on the main street in front of the train station, and headed back to his apartment.

Naturally, the two didn't exchange a single word throughout the trip on the taxi, when they entered the apartment block and took the elevator up, or even when they entered his home. Whilst in the rain, Jyuu was walking at a pretty quick pace, but Ame didn't seem tired at all. In complete contrast to her delicate appearance, she was surprisingly fit.

Since neither of them had an umbrella, they were both soaked. Given the season they were in, it was unlikely that they would catch a cold, but it didn't feel pleasant being drenched to the bone.

For the time being, Jyuu headed into the bathroom to pick up two bath towels. Tossing one wordlessly to Ame, he draped the remaining one over his head. As he started scrubbing briskly at his hair, he glanced at Ame.

The girl had taken the towel and was wiping her face. It went without saying that she needed a change of clothes first. But there wasn't a single piece of female clothing in the house. There was plenty of that which belonged to his mother, but he didn't want to touch them.

Whilst her uniform is drying, I guess she can wear my clothes.

If it was Satsuki Miya, for example, Jyuu would be more conscious of the fact that she was a member of the opposite sex who was around his age.

But, somehow, that feeling wasn't as strong when it came to the denpa girl.

Jyuu changed into a shirt in his room, then picked a suitable pair of trainers and trousers from his wardrobe and tossed them to Ame.

“Take off your uniform and put those on. So I can put your uniform in the dryer.”

As for why he didn't hand it over to her directly, for some reason, he hated the idea of touching the denpa girl.

He had grabbed her hand just now, but that was purely because it was an emergency.

Jyuu wasn't too clear himself why he was so wary of Ochibane Ame.

“Thank you very much.”

With that, Ame started stripping off her uniform, right there and then. Without the slightest bit of shame, as though Jyuu didn't exist. Jyuu turned his back on her, only looking back at appropriate intervals to pick up the discarded pieces of clothing. Then, he stuffed them together with his own uniform into the dryer.

It would probably be a good time to make some tea. He poured water into the kettle, set it on the stove and turned on the fire.

“Just sit wherever you want.”

As he spoke to Ame, Jyuu sat himself down on one of the tables around the dining table.

Even though they were a family of three, there were four chairs.

When he was young, he thought there might have been plans to further grow the family, or perhaps they were saving it for when guests came over, but both were wrong. His parents didn't have the kind of parental love to make them want another boy or girl, and they weren't the type to call over people to their place either. It was just the fact that, when they purchased the furniture, it came with four chairs. Simple as that.

Ame moved so she was facing Jyuu but remained standing.

“Take a seat.”

“No, this is fine for me.”

Not interested in forcing the matter, Jyuu picked up the TV's remote control without another word.

However, watching television just felt like a cheap way of escaping reality.

As he fiddled with the remote, he asked,

“Your name's ^{rain} Ame, right?”

“Yes.”

“^{Rain} Ame getting soaked by rain. What a joke.”

To regain his composure, he made idle talk.

Keeping his eyes fixed on his hands, he didn't even so much look in Ame's direction and Jyuu was well-aware that he was completely the one at fault this time.

“You didn't get hurt?”

“No.”

“...I shouldn't have done that, my apologies.”

Putting aside the remote on the table, Jyuu bowed his head deeply.

It'd been a long time since he'd done this to anyone.

“The one who set those guys on you was me. It's all my fault. You didn't do anything wrong. You can hate me or yell at me all you want. You can even hit me. Or report me to the police. No matter what, I won't make any excuses, no matter what.”

His head bowed, Jyuu said the above in one breath.

It was all the truth, pure unadulterated truth.

He felt that he couldn't make up for it, no matter what he did.

However, Jyuu, waiting for Ame's response, heard something that was

completely beyond his expectations.

“I don't believe there is any reason at all for me to be angry at Jyuu-sama.”

Was he not getting through to her? Jyuu lifted his head to see Ame's face for the first time.

And in that moment, he completely lost his train of thought.

Ame, who was towelling her wet hair, had lifted her fringe, revealing her face.

It was like something out of manga.

If she takes off her glasses, if she changes her hair style, a plain-looking girl could actually turn out very cute.

Jyuu never thought such a fairytale could exist in reality.

As it turned out, reality was a little different than he'd expected.

Ochibane Ame's features couldn't be described as cute. Rather than “cute”, the more appropriate word should be “beautiful”. A beauty with an allure that captured a person's attention, making them want to stare some more. Porcelain-white skin framed by coils of wet hair, so pale it appeared bloodless, almost lifeless. A strong will that shone from her almond-shaped eyes made a deep impression; they were deep eyes, as though they could see right through you to learn your innermost secrets.

Jyuu was reminded of a small ^{snow woman} ~~yuki onna~~.

A girl who combined the beauty to bewitch all beholders and the power to freeze you to your very soul.

Feeling like he had taken a punch to his gut, he swallowed hard.

Ame continued.

“I do not know what is going on in Jyuu-sama's mind. However, if it is Jyuu-sama's will or decision, it is my wish and my duty to do my utmost to obey. That is why, Jyuu-sama has no need whatsoever to apologise for what happened today.”

Those were not words of comfort, nor were they sophisms to cover for what he did-this was a reflection of the line of reasoning that the girl was immersed in,

right down to her very bones.

Because, unlike usually, her fringe was out of the way, Jyuu could tell this girl was absolutely serious from the earnestness on her face.

But just because he understood that didn't mean he was accepting of it.

“D-d'ya even know what're ya talking about?”

“More or less, yes.”

“Isn't it normal to get pissed of?!”

“Jyuu-sama, you are mistaken. Like I said, there is no reason for me to be angry.”

“I'm the one who's saying that I'm wrong!”

“Jyuu-sama came to save me.”

“Like I said, that's...!”

He really couldn't get in her hand.

No matter what a beauty she was, a denpa girl was a denpa girl.

Even so, Jyuu intended to take responsibility for his actions.

Reflecting on it from a more rational point-of-view, perhaps this was purely for his own self-satisfaction.

“Hit me.”

“Why?”

“Just do it, hit me.”

“Is this an order?”

“Yes!”

“Then, please excuse me.”

The flat of Ame's hand caught Jyuu's cheek. Making good use of the flick of the wrist, it was a blow that could well knock down the opponent in a cat fight.

It hurt more than expected, but at the same time, it made him feel better.

“I'm not asking you to call it even with this, or to forgive me. But if there's

anything I can do to make up for it, just say the word.”

“There's no need to make up for anything...”

“Tell me what you want! It's an order!”

“Yes, my lord.”

Ame nodded simply.

Even though Jyuu was forcing the conversation along, she didn't seem the slightest bit bothered.

If anything, she acted as if this was completely normal.

Jyuu felt extremely embarrassed, but nonetheless waited for Ame to speak.

He wouldn't be able to forgive himself if he did nothing. Again, this was entirely for his own satisfaction.

Ame took about ten seconds to think over the matter.

She looked up at Jyuu and voiced out her wish.

“...I have but one request.”

“What?”

“Please, allow me to stay by Jyuu-sama's side.”

His response to this was something Jyuu regretted countless times afterwards.

But in this moment, in this situation, Jyuu only had one thing to say to that.

When she turned her sincere gaze to him, he felt, perhaps, just a little, deeply moved.

She was a denpa girl, someone you couldn't communicate with, a creep.

Even so, Jyuu replied as thus:

“Whatever.”

When he saw Ame's expression, for a moment, Jyuu had the delusion that he had made the best choice.

Yes, that was probably a delusion.

All humans are the same-they live their life out in a delusion.

They can live because they delude themselves.

For the first time since they met, Ochibane Ame gave a faint smile.

A look of pure joy.

Chapter 2 - The Confusing Everyday

Chapter 2 The Confusing Everyday After class the next day, Ochibane Ame walked into Jyuu's classroom without any reservation.

Coming up right to his seat, she spoke to Jyuu, who was packing to go home.

“I came to pick you up.”

“Heyo.”

Carrying the flimsy school bag under his arm, Jyuu gave two short nods of his head.

Seeing this, Miya pointed to and from Jyuu and Ame and tilted her head slightly.

“What's your relationship?”

“A master-servant relationship.”

“Just friends.”

Thinking it'd be too risky to let the conversation go on too long, Jyuu pulled Miya and Ame apart.

It was only natural that Miya was curious, but he didn't feel like explaining in the slightest.

How was he supposed to explain it in the first place anyway?

It was just a mish-mash of things happening, reaping what he sowed and getting his just desserts.

“Wait, Jyuuzawa!”

Fujishima Kanako, the class representative, closed in on Jyuu in a brisk pace.

One hand was set on her waist, and the eyes behind her glasses were narrowed.

“I thought you'd turned a new leaf after you dyed your hair again, but now you're taking girls into classrooms...!”

“Please wait a moment.”

Before Jyuu could respond, Ochibana Ame stepped in front of Fujishima Kanako.

As though she was protecting Jyuu.

“Are you Jyuu-sama's enemy?”

“-Sama'? 'Enemy'? What do you mean? But more importantly, it's not that appropriate to associate with guys like him.”

“How so?”

“You're asking how...? Well, you'll be judged for it.”

“If it's for Jyuu-sama's sake, I'd willing to brave the flames of Hell.”

“Y-you...”

“Jyuu-sama's happiness is my happiness. Jyuu-sama's wishes are my wishes. I exist purely for the sake of Jyuu-sama. And the reason for that is because of the strong bond with Jyuu-sama in our past life...”

To prevent the conversation from straying into a really bad direction, Jyuu frantically clamped a hand over Ame's mouth and dragged her away.

“Bye, Fujishima. See ya tomorrow too, Miya.”

Bathed in the curious gazes of his classmates, Jyuu left the classroom together with Ame.

(in progress)